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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the impact of a one-time persuasive message presented to subjects across two media--audio and audiovisual. A second variable, distraction, was also examined for its induced impact on conferring resistance to the message. Subjects were 170 college undergraduates, 46 of whom were assigned to a control group that did not see or hear the experimental message. The remaining 124 subjects were assigned either to audio or audiovisual modes of presentation and then to one of three distracter groups: positive argument critical response set, negative argument critical response set, or no critical response set. Results showed that verbally induced distraction, when induced as negative arguments, increased resistance to the persuasive message. In addition, subjects viewing the presentation were more susceptable to the message and viewed the message source as more credible and attractive than did those who merely listened to it. (FL)

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AN EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF MODE OF PRESENTATION AND VERBALLY-INDUCED DISTRACTION ON COMMUNICATION ACCEPTANCE

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CS 504 296

AN EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF MODE PRESENTATION

AND VERBALLY-INDUCED DISTRACTION ON COMMUNICATION ACCEPTANCE

Abstract

This study investigated the impact of a verbally-induced distractor (critical response set to either "good" or "bad" arguments or no distraction) on a persuasive message presented across two modes of presentation (audio and audiovisual). The data (N = 124) supported the hypothesis that verbally-induced distraction, when induced as "bad" arguments, increased resistance to the persuasive message. Additionally, as predicted, people viewing the presentation were more susceptable to the message and viewed the message source as more credible and attractive than those merely listening to the same message and source. Results were interpreted in terms of a one-shot persuasive message whereby immediate impact is measured and persuasiveness claimed by the source and expanded to multiple-message situations.

AN EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF MODE OF PRESENTATION

AND VERBALLY-INDUCED DISTRACTION ON COMMUNICATION ACCEPTANCE

The recent use of one-shot persuasive messages seems to run counter to the claim that persuasion is generally a process in which several messages are presented to an individual, each competing with each other. Current political use of the persuasive message, for example, presents a persuasive message (e.g., state of the economy, need to cut welfare spending) to a mass audience through either television or radio and then measures the direct impact through audience telephone feedback or on-the-spot surveys by local and/or national forecasters. Such use of a persuasive message then suggests that the one-time message may be coming more central to the understanding of how we change attitudes than previously believed.

The present study investigated a similar phenomenon. Based on the use of one-time persuasive messages presented across at least two media, radio and television, the impact of each was measured. A second variable, that of distraction, was also examined for its induced impact on conferring resistance to the message conveyed through a verbal "slip" to look for different types of arguments. It was thought that differences would be found for both the mode of presentation and the type of critical distractive set the audience was set to.

Inducement of Distraction

Our interest in distraction as a means of mediating the impact of a persuasive message stems from earlier work by Michael Burgoon and associates (Burgoon, Cohen, Miller, and Montegomery,1978; Miller and Burgoon, 1979) which suggests that people can be made to modify their perception of an on-coming message by distracting them either toward message or source. Such modification comes about when the person's need to counterargue the message is reduced through changes in the perceived threat of the message's position. Since the potential of any

message to be influential is dependent upon its being received and understood, its probability of being discredited, and the validity of the arguments contained within it (Weyer, 1974), any disruption or focusing on or within any of these factors may alter the message's impact.

The underlying principle of distracting a receiver is found in the psychological process of counterarguing. Festinger and Maccoby (1964) first offered the claim that people actively engage in the generation of counterarguments when presented with a belief-discrepant message. Several investigations have supported this direct relationship between counterarguing/distraction and attitude change (Brietrose, 1966; Brock, 1967; Osterhouse and Brock, 1970; Keating and Brock, 1974), finding that as a message advocates a position further from the receiver's position more counterarguments are generated. Further, the relationship between counterarguing may also enhance or inhibit perceptions of source credibility (Festinger and Maccoby, 1964; Baron, Baron, and Miller, 1973).

The impact of distracting a receiver of a persuasive message is mediated by several factors. First, the degree of distraction (extreme to low) has had a demonstrated effect on the amount of attitude change. Moderate distraction has been found to produce the greatest amount of attitude change (e.g., Garner, 1966; McGuire, 1966; Haaland and Venkatesan, 1968; Vohs and Garrett, 1968; Zimbardo, Ebbeson, and Fraser, 1969). Extreme distraction simply interfers with the learning of the arguments contained in the message while low distraction does nothing to impact on the counterarguing process. One major criticism of the distraction research, however, is the lack of a communicator-induced distractor that can be employed more subtly than flashing lights, increasing/decreasing mode volume, eating while listening, environmental and/or irrelevant tasks, etc. There should be a way of inducing a moderate distractor either verbally or nonverbally. Stacks and Burgoon (1981) suggest, for example, that in interpersonal influence attempts, interpersonal distance and the reward power of

the message source may serve as moderate distractors and offer partial support for their position.

A second factor serving to mediate the effect of distraction is the focus of attention. Focus on the message while being distracted yields more attitude change than a focus on the distractor (Zimbardo, Snyder, Thomas, Gold, and Gurwitz, 1970). Additionally, focus on positive aspects of either message or message source may also enhance message acceptance, at least in the first message presentation (e.g., Burgoon, Cohen, Miller, and Montgomery, 1978).

Finally, the type of message mediates the distractive impact. Regan and Cheng (1973) found that simple messages are more effective than complex messages under conditions of distraction. This, along with focus of attention and type of distractor, suggests that distracting receivers does affect the counterarguing process, possibly inhibiting or enhancing source derogation/praise, and affect the amount of attitude change for a given message.

Of interest to this study is the finding that the act of concentrating on either specific arguments (e.g., good or bad) or source characteristics (e.g., good or bad) while receiving a persuasive message is itself moderately distracting (Brugoon, Cohen, Miller and Montgomery, 1978). They found that not only was the focus of attention in itself distracting, but that the positiveness or negativeness of the distraction also affected the perceived impact of the message. In line with this finding is Miller and Burgoon's (1979) finding that expectancy violations operate in approximately the same way. People who expect high intense messages but receive low intense messages are more positive toward the message after receiving first persuasive message. Conversely, people expecting a low intense message but who receive a high intense message are less positive about the message. The underlying rationale rationale for the violation of expectations prediction is that people who

expect a negative message but receive one less negative than they are led to believe experience a positive violation of expectations and are not motivated (threatened) to counterargue. People expecting a less negative message but receiving a more negative message experience a negative violation of expectations and are motivated (threatened) to counterargue. Stacks and Burgoon (1981) use the same basic arguments in their model, except the motivation is mediated by the distance maintained or deviated from between a source of differing degrees of reward and the receiver. Thus, inducement to distraction may take the form of expecting something and either having that expectation violated positively or negatively.

The impact of concentrating on specific features of a message or source, or being led to believe that a message will conform to one set of expectations and receiving another could be defined as a "pretreatment" message. A significant body of persuasion research has arisen based on pretreatment messages and their effect as inoculators for subsequent messages. This model of persuasion suggests that just as we immunize the body to a disease with a weakened form of the virus, we can "inoculate" a receiver against future persuasive appeals by exposing him or her to weakened forms of argument (McGuire, 1964). Such a model suggests that pretreatment messages stimulate the receiver's defense mechanisms, but do not destroy them. It is further presumed that pretreatments designed to threaten the receiver motivate that person to defend (counterargue) his/her position while receiveing the message. Pretreatments designed to reduce the threat should reduce the motivation to defend (counterargue) the forthcoming message. Both the act of concentrating on the message and the expectation of some outcome that is violated should be distracting in a predictable way. What is of interest to this study is the mode of inducing such a distraction.

Traditionally, the inoculation model presents pretreatments in the form of some type of message which consists of weakened forms of the expected arguments. Based on the findings of Burgoon et al. (1978), simply setting the receiver to a critical response set should provide the "pretreatment" effect predicted by the inoculation model. In otherwords, by forewarning that the next message might contain either good or bad arguments, the receiver should be either motivated to counterargue the message or have that motivation inhibited. The critical response set thus acts to induce the receiver to a negative evaluation of the message (looking for bad arguments) or to a positive evaluation of the message (looking for good arguments). Those who are induced toward a negative expectation should not be distracted and should counterargue the message; those induced toward a positive expectation should be distracted, counterargue less, and be more susceptable to the message. Additionally, it is reasonable to presume that such a critical response set could be induced by some form of verbal statement.

Mode of Presentation

A second area of interest to this study is the media through which the persuasive message is presented. This interest is focused on two concerns. First, current one-shot persuasive messages (e.g., presidential "addresses" to the nation) use either radio (audio) or television (audiovisual) as their major communication channels. This concern is magnified with the "next day" analysis based on number of telephone calls received and/or local or national surveys of receivers. In other words, the impact of the message is analyzed almost immediately. A second concern is the effect that the media may have on distraction. Although it will be argued that distraction, as a strategy, is not affected by media, at least intially, some research has questioned whether or not the context (personal, audio, audiovisual) affects distraction (Stacks, 1978). Therefore, it was felt that the media through which the

message was presented should be examined.

Although it would seem almost axiomatic that two communication media might result in differing persuasive outcomes, very little research has really addressed the impact of audio and audiovisual types of presentation. What research we do have suggests that the written message may be more effective than other modes of presentation (e.g., Wall and Boyd, 1971); however, in terms of inducing resistance to persuasion, Sprague (1970) found no differences across live presentation, audio presentation, and written presentation of a message. These studies would suggest that reception of a persuasive message may not be dependent on the mode of presentation. It would seem, however, that differences should occur between media, if for no other reason than the type of information conveyed within each channel.

Audiovisual presentation of a message should approximate that of a "live" speaker. Any number of studies have found that people show little if any preference for live versus audiovisual presentations (e.g., Simonson, Thies, and Burch, 1979; Simonson, 1980). Additionally, the notion of "hot" versus "cold" communication media (McLuhan, 1964, 1967) effectiveness has alos been called into question (Bringmann, Balance, and Krichev, 1969). These reviews and studies suggest that people today "see" no difference between a live presentation or one that has been videotaped or televised. Hence, the amount of information conveyed between the media (live and audio) should be roughly equivalent and we could expect messages presented across each to produce similar results (c.f., Sprague, 1970).

What differences we should expect to find between audio and audiovisual media are located in the nonverbal channel. With the audiovisual presentation come the kinesic cues that accompany, reinforce, complement, and expand upon the verbal message. The audio message, on the other hand, stresses the verbal, the more message-oriented channel to the exclusion of the comprehension-gaining

impact of illustrative nonverbal behavior. A recent study by Rogers (1978) suggests that the addition of kinesic cues can, at times, increase the comprehension of a message and coordinate with the verbal message to convey actual meaning. Such kinesic behaviors serve to impact on the message source's credibility and task and social attraction, too, and serve as relational messages about the communicator (e.g., Burgoon and Saine, 1978).

What we should expect, then, is as channel information decreases via the relational impact of fewer coordinating cues such as gestures and facial expression, attention should be focused more on the message and its arguments. Such a focus should lead to a more critical evaluation of the arguments contained in the message. Or, put another way, the audiovisual presentation of a persuasive message distracts the receiver from focusing on the more negative aspects of the message by viewing the source as being more credible and/or attractive than he or she actually is. One would expect, then, that people would be more resistant to a persuasive message presented in an audio mode since counterargumentation would be enhanced and when that message is presented in an audiovisual mode that people would be more susceptable to the message.

Although the focus on the message source in the audiovisual presentation may be distractive, it should not be so distractive as to have a major impact on the reception of the message. The type of distraction between media is more informational in nature; that is, the distraction is based on the lack of competing or coordinating information rather than the dividing of attention through some environmental or task manipulation. Distraction, as a persuasive strategy, suggests the active interrupting or interferring of the processing of information conveyed in the message. Such a strategy of disrupting the presentation of information should produce similar results across media, at least for initial message reception.

Hypotheses

Based on the rationale presented which suggests that critical response sets can be induced verbally, the follwing hypothesis was generated:

H_1: People who are verbally induced to be negatively critical of arguments will be less susceptable to the message than people verbally induced to be positive about the arguments or people not distracted.

Based on the discussion of mode of presentation, which suggested that receivers should view message sources as more credible and attractive in the audiovisual mode than the audio mode, and upon research suggesting that comprehension is better in an audiovisual than audio mode, the following hypotheses were generated:

H_2: People viewing an audiovisual presentation will perceive the message source as more credible and attractive than people merely listening to the same presentation.

H_3: People who view an audiovisual presentation will be more susceptable to a persuasive message than people who receive the same message in an audio mode.

These three hypotheses suggest that there will be no interaction between distraction and mode of presentation (media) at the intial message presentation. This is due to the impact of immediate threat and message presentation without allowing for time to elapse and defenses to build. Given a second message at a later time, we would assume that the model would work much like that suggested by Burgoon et al. (1978) and as modified by Miller and Burgoon (1979). This study, however, was only concerned with initial message reception and the impact of verbally-induced critical response sets across the two modes of presentation.

Method

Sample

Subjects were 170 undergraduates enrolled in basic speech communication courses at a southeastern university. Forty-six subjects were randomly assigned to a control group which did not see or hear the experimental message and served as an off-set control group and "baseline" attitude measure. The remaining 124 subjects were randomly assigned to either audio or audiovisual modes of presentation. After assignment to media treatments subjects were then assigned to one of three groups: positive argument critical response set, negative argument critical response set, or no critical response set.

Message Construction

The experimental message used in this study was one of two used by Burgoon et al. (1978) and advocated the legalization of heroin for crime purposes. The message took approximately three minutes to deliver, was highly comprehensible, contained moderately intense language, and had a readibility index of 12 years of formal education. The message was transcribed and re-recorded using a female undergraduate student as the message source.

Procedures

After the audiovisual tape was prepared an audio version was duplicated. Both tapes had inserted in the first 13 seconds either a verbally-induced distractor suggesting the forthcoming message contained good or bad arguments. Specifically, the first five seconds of each tape was empty (black screen in the audiovisual mode), a male voice was then overheard at a lower volume than the message to say: "This speaker has some really good arguments" (good argument inducement) or "This speaker's message has some pretty bad arguments." A second five-second delay was then shown or heard (black screen in the audiovisual mode) and the message then presented.

Subjects were informed at the beginning of the session that they were participating in a study examining the impact of various modes on messages. Subjects were then informed that they were either to see a videotaped message or hear an audiotaped message. They were informed that the speaker was a last quarter senior speaking on a subject that she had interned on. This credibility manipulation was deemed necessary based on an earlier finding by Burgoon, Fraedrich, and Bachman (1979) who found a distraction by credibility of source interaction. After the credibility manipulation videotape or audiotape was turned on the subjects viewed/heard the message. After receiving the message subjects were asked to evaluate what they had just heard and/or seen. Subjects then completed a posttest booklet containing the attitude measure, a measure of credibility and a measure of attraction. The attitude measure consisted of the four evaluative items suggested by Osgoon, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957). The source credibility scales measured peer credibility via McCroskey, Jensen, and Valencia's (1973) semantic differential scales which tapped five dimensions of credibility: competence, composure, character, sociability, and extroversion. Attraction was measured by two of three sub-scales developed by McCroskey and McCain (1974) which tapped social and task attractiveness. All subjects were were debriefed.

Reliability of Measures

Reliability of all dependent measures were tested by Chronbach's (1951) Coefficient Alpha. The reliabilities for the credibility and attraction scales were all above .80; reliability coefficients for each dimension were as follow: composure (.82), character (.91), competence (.84), sociability (.88), extroversion (.93), task attraction (.81), and social attraction (.86). The reliability coefficient for the semantic differential measure of attitude was .93.

Results

Manipulation Checks

As a check as to whether or not the persuasive message was persuasive across all experimental conditions, the attitude scores of the control group, which received no message, were compared against those of the experimental groups. Analyses of variance yielded significant F-ratios for both mode of presentation and distraction ($F = 8.40$; $df=2/167$; $p < .05$ for mode of presentation and $F = 8.36$; $df=3/166$; $p < .05$ for distraction). Dunnett's t-tests for control group comparisions revealed that all experimental conditions were significantly greater than the control group (see Table 1).

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis One predicted that people who were verbally induced to be critical of the arguments would be more resistant to the message than those who were induced to be to look for good arguments. This hypothesis was tested with an added group of people who were not distracted in order to test for the impact of good versus bad compared to no critical response set. A significant main effect was obtained ($F = 4.46$; $df = 2/118$; $p < .05$) whereby subjects induced to look for bad arguments were significantly less persuaded ($\bar{X} = 8.21$) than those induced to look for good arguments ($\bar{X} = 11.89$) or not distracted ($\bar{X} = 11.56$). This finding was taken as support for the inducement of critical response set.

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis predicted that mode of presentation would affect receiver's perceptions of source credibility and attraction. Significant mode effects were obtained for the dimensions of credibility ($df = 1/118$; $p < .05$) of competence ($F = 7.56$), character ($F = 15.43$), sociability ($F = 6.93$), and extroversion ($F = 15.29$). In all but the case of extroversion means were higher in the audiovisual mode than the audio mode. For the two attraction

dimensions, significant effects ($df = 1/118$; $p < .05$) for both social attraction ($F = 6.98$) and task attraction ($F = 6.63$). In each case the means for the audiovisual mode were higher than the audio mode. Taken together, these findings offer strong support for the proposition that the media through which the message is presented affects reception. (See Table 2 for means.)

Hypothesis Three

The final hypothesis predicted that people who viewed the persuasive message would be more susceptable than people who merely listened to the same message. A significant main effect for mode was found ($F = 4.22$; $df = 1/118$; $p < .05$) whereby the means for the audiovisual mode were higher than those for the audio mode, thus supporting the hypothesis. (See Table 1 for means.)

Supplemental Credibility and Attraction Analyses

Supplemental analyses were computed for each of the five dimensions of credibility and the two dimensions of attraction for the distraction conditions. No significant main effects were obtained.

Discussion

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the results of this study. First, the inducement of distraction can be obtained by a verbal insertion prior to the message presentation. Second, the media used to present the persuasive message affects its reception. Third, the media used affects the receiver's perception of the source's credibility and attraction. And, finally, there is no interaction between type of media and distraction. These findings should lead to further research when an immediate response is desired from an audience and should also lead to possible persuasive strategies in inducing resistance to that message.

The inducement of a simple verbal statement suggesting that the forthcoming message contains "bad" arguments presents a simple yet apparently effective way of inducing some type of motivation to counterargue. Compared to the suggestion

that the message contains "good" arguments, subjects distracted toward negative expectations are more resistant to the message. A finding that there was no difference between those who were not distracted and those distracted toward good arguments suggests that the message was effective. Future research might examine the effects of less persuasive arguments and the inducement of a "good" argument critical response set.

The finding that mode of presentation affects the persuasiveness of the message and the source's credibility and attraction suggests that different types of media might be re-investigated for their impact on the receiver. This is especially true where the message source may not possess the vocal qualities necessary to enhance his or her message. Given that the message source in this study was a fairly attractive female and one who used kinesic cues effectively, one would suspect that the congruence between verbal and nonverbal messages on the audiovisual mode was very high. Indeed, in re-examining the video and audio tapes it was hard to believe that the same person had presented the message. Unlike the earlier use of the message, however, this message had several natural vocal slips and pauses filled by gesture did not appear on the audio tape, instead they reduced the impact of the message. Such differences should be considered prior to deciding which media the source would be most effective in.

Finally, the lack of an interaction between distraction and mode of presentation suggests that, at the initial message reception at least, distraction operates the same way across media. Given a second message at a later time, an interaction effect would be predicted. That interaction effect would be based on the amount of threat in the critical response set and the media. Along the lines of Burgoon, Cohen, Miller, and Montgomery (1978) and Miller and Burgoon (1979), the addition of a second message at a later date would motivate defenses to future messages. In this regard those who looked for good arguments would revert back to their original positions while those who looked for bad arguments would be more

susceptable to later attacks. The effect of mode should operate about the same way that language intensity violations operated in the Miller and Burgoon (1979) study. Those viewing the audiovisual presentation first would perceive the message a positive violation of expectations while those listening to the audio presentation would perceive the message a negative violation of expectations. The predictions would run parallel to those of Miller and Burgoon.

In summary, the impact of media choice may be more important than we have currently thought. In cases where there is a one-shot message and immediate message evaluation, audiovisual (televised) messages should be more persuasive than audio (radio) messages. The simple inducement of critical response set can induce resistance to persuasion, at least where receivers are looking for bad arguments. With the advent of more sophisticated ways to measure immediate message acceptance such variables (mode of presentation and induced distraction) may take on more important status in persuasion research. Future research should continue to examine the contributions each have in inducing resistance to a persuasive message and, ultimately, overcoming that resistance.

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TABLE 1

MEANS FOR ATTITUDE

Mode of Presentation	$\bar{X}$
Audio	9.87_a
Audiovisual	11.23_b
Distraction	
Bad Arguments	8.21_a
Good Arguments	11.89_b
No Distraction	11.56_b
Control	
No Message	5.61

Means with same subscript do not differ at $p < .05$ level of significance.

TABLE 2

MEANS FOR CREDIBILITY AND ATTRACTION BY MODE

	Audio	Audiovisual
Credibility		
Competence	14.52	16.52
Composure	12.22	13.08
Character	13.69	15.91
Sociability	13.83	15.32
Extroversion	13.39	11.20
Attraction		
Task	14.20	12.51
Social	13.03	14.78

TABLE 3

MEANS FOR CREDIBILITY AND ATTRACTION BY DISTRACTION

	Bad Arguments	Good Arguments	No Distraction
Credibility			
Competence	14.60	16.44	15.91
Composure	13.19	12.26	12.46
Character	14.61	15.00	14.98
Sociability	14.56	14.48	14.70
Extroversion	12.19	11.85	12.48
Attraction			
Task	12.72	13.78	13.74
Social	13.44	14.56	14.06